

PD WEEKLY - JULY 20, 2017



"Landscape" by Albert Pinkham Ryder (American, New Bedford, Massachusetts 1847–1917 Elmhurst, New York) via The Metropolitan Museum of Art is licensed under CC0 1.0

**WILKIE COLLINS
POETRY QUARTET
SUSAN GLASPELL
GEORGE O. SMITH**

MR. LISMORE AND THE WIDOW.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Little Novels*, by Wilkie Collins

I.

LATE in the autumn, not many years since, a public meeting was held at the Mansion House, London, under the direction of the Lord Mayor.

The list of gentlemen invited to address the audience had been chosen with two objects in view. Speakers of celebrity, who would rouse public enthusiasm, were supported by speakers connected with commerce, who would be practically useful in explaining the purpose for which the meeting was convened. Money wisely spent in advertising had produced the customary result--every seat was occupied before the proceedings began.

Among the late arrivals, who had no choice but to stand or to leave the hall, were two ladies. One of them at once decided on leaving the hall. "I shall go back to the carriage," she said, "and wait for you at the door." Her friend answered, "I shan't keep you long. He is advertised to support the second Resolution; I want to see him--and that is all."

An elderly gentleman, seated at the end of a bench, rose and offered his place to the lady who remained. She hesitated to take advantage of his kindness, until he reminded her that he had heard what she said to her friend. Before the third Resolution was proposed, his seat would be at his own disposal again. She thanked him, and without further ceremony took his place. He was provided with an opera-glass, which he more than once offered to her, when famous orators appeared on the platform; she made no use of it until a speaker--known in the City as a ship-owner--stepped forward to support the second Resolution.

His name (announced in the advertisements) was Ernest Lismore.

The moment he rose, the lady asked for the opera-glass. She kept it to her eyes for such a length of time, and with such evident interest in Mr. Lismore, that the curiosity of her neighbors was aroused. Had he anything to say in which a lady (evidently a stranger to him) was personally interested? There was nothing in the address that he delivered which appealed to the enthusiasm of women. He was undoubtedly a handsome man, whose appearance proclaimed him to be in the prime of life--midway perhaps between thirty and forty years of age. But why a lady should persist in keeping an opera-glass fixed on him all through his speech, was a question which found the general ingenuity at a loss for a reply.

Having returned the glass with an apology, the lady ventured on putting a question next. "Did it strike you, sir, that Mr. Lismore seemed to be out of spirits?" she asked.

"I can't say it did, ma'am."

"Perhaps you noticed that he left the platform the moment he had done?"

This betrayal of interest in the speaker did not escape the notice of a lady, seated on the bench in front. Before the old gentleman could answer, she volunteered an explanation.

"I am afraid Mr. Lismore is troubled by anxieties connected with his business," she said. "My husband heard it reported in the City yesterday that he was seriously embarrassed by the failure--"

A loud burst of applause made the end of the sentence inaudible. A famous member of Parliament had risen to propose the third Resolution. The polite old man took his seat, and the lady left the hall to join her friend.

"Well, Mrs. Callender, has Mr. Lismore disappointed you?"

"Far from it! But I have heard a report about him which has alarmed me: he is said to be seriously troubled about money matters. How can I find out his address in the City?"

"We can stop at the first stationer's shop we pass, and ask to look at the Directory. Are you going to pay Mr. Lismore a visit?"

"I am going to think about it."

II.

THE next day a clerk entered Mr. Lismore's private room at the office, and presented a visiting-card. Mrs. Callender had reflected, and had arrived at a decision. Underneath her name she had written these explanatory words: "On important business."

"Does she look as if she wanted money?" Mr. Lismore inquired.

"Oh dear, no! She comes in her carriage."

"Is she young or old?"

"Old, sir."

To Mr. Lismore--conscious of the disastrous influence occasionally exercised over busy men by youth and beauty--this was a recommendation in itself. He said: "Show her in."

Observing the lady, as she approached him, with the momentary curiosity of a stranger, he noticed that she still preserved the remains of

beauty. She had also escaped the misfortune, common to persons at her time of life, of becoming too fat. Even to a man's eye, her dressmaker appeared to have made the most of that favorable circumstance. Her figure had its defects concealed, and its remaining merits set off to advantage. At the same time she evidently held herself above the common deceptions by which some women seek to conceal their age. She wore her own gray hair; and her complexion bore the test of daylight. On entering the room, she made her apologies with some embarrassment. Being the embarrassment of a stranger (and not of a youthful stranger), it failed to impress Mr. Lismore favorably.

"I am afraid I have chosen an inconvenient time for my visit," she began.

"I am at your service," he answered a little stiffly; "especially if you will be so kind as to mention your business with me in few words."

She was a woman of some spirit, and that reply roused her.

"I will mention it in one word," she said smartly. "My business is--gratitude."

He was completely at a loss to understand what she meant, and he said so plainly. Instead of explaining herself, she put a question.

"Do you remember the night of the eleventh of March, between five and six years since?"

He considered for a moment.

"No," he said, "I don't remember it. Excuse me, Mrs. Callender, I have affairs of my own to attend to which cause me some anxiety--"

"Let me assist your memory, Mr. Lismore; and I will leave you to your affairs. On the date that I have referred to, you were on your way to the railway-station at Bexmore, to catch the night express from the North to London."

As a hint that his time was valuable the ship-owner had hitherto remained standing. He now took his customary seat, and began to listen with some interest. Mrs. Callender had produced her effect on him already.

"It was absolutely necessary," she proceeded, "that you should be on board your ship in the London Docks at nine o'clock the next morning. If you had lost the express, the vessel would have sailed without you."

The expression of his face began to change to surprise. "Who told you that?" he asked.

"You shall hear directly. On your way into the town, your carriage was stopped by an obstruction on the highroad. The people of Bexmore were looking at a house on fire."

He started to his feet.

"Good heavens! are you the lady?"

She held up her hand in satirical protest.

"Gently, sir! You suspected me just now of wasting your valuable time. Don't rashly conclude that I am the lady, until you find that I am acquainted with the circumstances."

"Is there no excuse for my failing to recognize you?" Mr. Lismore asked. "We were on the dark side of the burning house; you were fainting, and I--"

"And you," she interposed, "after saving me at the risk of your own life, turned a deaf ear to my poor husband's entreaties, when he asked you to wait till I had recovered my senses."

"Your poor husband? Surely, Mrs. Callender, he received no serious injury from the fire?"

"The firemen rescued him under circumstances of peril," she answered, "and at his great age he sank under the shock. I have lost the kindest and best of men. Do you remember how you parted from him--burned and bruised in saving me? He liked to talk of it in his last illness. 'At least' (he said to you), 'tell me the name of the man who has preserved my wife from a dreadful death.' You threw your card to him out of the carriage window, and away you went at a gallop to catch your train! In all the years that have passed I have kept that card, and have vainly inquired for my brave sea-captain. Yesterday I saw your name on the list of speakers at the Mansion House. Need I say that I attended the meeting? Need I tell you now why I come here and interrupt you in business hours?"

She held out her hand. Mr. Lismore took it in silence, and pressed it warmly.

"You have not done with me yet," she resumed with a smile. "Do you remember what I said of my errand, when I first came in?"

"You said it was an errand of gratitude."

"Something more than the gratitude which only says 'Thank you,'" she added. "Before I explain myself, however, I want to know what you have been doing, and how it was that my inquiries failed to trace you after that terrible night."

The appearance of depression which Mrs. Callender had noticed at the public meeting showed itself again in Mr. Lismore's face. He sighed as he answered her.

"My story has one merit," he said; "it is soon told. I cannot wonder that you failed to discover me. In the first place, I was not captain of my ship at that time; I was only mate. In the second place, I inherited some money, and ceased to lead a sailor's life, in less than a year from the night of the fire. You will now understand what obstacles were in the way of your tracing me. With my little capital I started successfully in business as a ship-owner. At the time, I naturally congratulated myself on my own good fortune. We little know, Mrs. Callender, what the future has in store for us."

He stopped. His handsome features hardened--as if he was suffering (and concealing) pain. Before it was possible to speak to him, there was a knock at the door. Another visitor, without an appointment, had called; the clerk appeared again, with a card and a message.

"The gentleman begs you will see him, sir. He has something to tell you which is too important to be delayed."

Hearing the message, Mrs. Callender rose immediately.

"It is enough for to-day that we understand each other," she said. "Have you any engagement to-morrow, after the hours of business?"

"None."

She pointed to her card on the writing-table. "Will you come to me to-morrow evening at that address? I am like the gentleman who has just called; I, too, have my reason for wishing to see you."

He gladly accepted the invitation. Mrs. Callender stopped him as he opened the door for her.

"Shall I offend you," she said, "if I ask a strange question before I go? I have a better motive, mind, than mere curiosity. Are you married?"

"No."

"Forgive me again," she resumed. "At my age, you cannot possibly misunderstand me; and yet--"

She hesitated. Mr. Lismore tried to give her confidence. "Pray don't stand on ceremony, Mrs. Callender. Nothing that you can ask me need be prefaced by an apology."

Thus encouraged, she ventured to proceed.

"You may be engaged to be married?" she suggested. "Or you may be in love?"

He found it impossible to conceal his surprise. But he answered without hesitation.

"There is no such bright prospect in _my_ life," he said. "I am not even in love."

She left him with a little sigh. It sounded like a sigh of relief.

Ernest Lismore was thoroughly puzzled. What could be the old lady's object in ascertaining that he was still free from a matrimonial engagement? If the idea had occurred to him in time, he might have alluded to her domestic life, and might have asked if she had children? With a little tact he might have discovered more than this. She had described her feeling toward him as passing the ordinary limits of gratitude; and she was evidently rich enough to be above the imputation of a mercenary motive. Did she propose to brighten those dreary prospects to which he had alluded in speaking of his own life? When he presented himself at her house the next evening, would she introduce him to a charming daughter?

He smiled as the idea occurred to him. "An appropriate time to be thinking of my chances of marriage!" he said to himself. "In another month I may be a ruined man."

III.

THE gentleman who had so urgently requested an interview was a devoted friend--who had obtained a means of helping Ernest at a serious crisis in his affairs.

It had been truly reported that he was in a position of pecuniary embarrassment, owing to the failure of a mercantile house with which he had been intimately connected. Whispers affecting his own solvency had followed on the bankruptcy of the firm. He had already endeavored to obtain advances of money on the usual conditions, and had been met by excuses for delay. His friend had now arrived with a letter of introduction to a capitalist, well known in commercial circles for his daring speculations and for his great wealth.

Looking at the letter, Ernest observed that the envelope was sealed. In spite of that ominous innovation on established usage, in cases of personal introduction, he presented the letter. On this occasion, he was not put off with excuses. The capitalist flatly declined to discount Mr. Lismore's bills, unless they were backed by responsible names.

Ernest made a last effort.

He applied for help to two mercantile men whom he had assisted in _their_ difficulties, and whose names would have satisfied the money-lender. They were most sincerely sorry--but they, too, refused.

The one security that he could offer was open, it must be owned, to serious objections on the score of risk. He wanted an advance of twenty thousand pounds, secured on a homeward-bound ship and cargo. But the vessel was not insured; and, at that stormy season, she was already more than a month overdue. Could grateful colleagues be blamed if they forgot their obligations when they were asked to offer pecuniary help to a merchant in this situation? Ernest returned to his office, without money and without credit.

A man threatened by ruin is in no state of mind to keep an engagement at a lady's tea-table. Ernest sent a letter of apology to Mrs. Callender, alleging extreme pressure of business as the excuse for breaking his engagement.

"Am I to wait for an answer, sir?" the messenger asked.

"No; you are merely to leave the letter."

IV.

IN an hour's time--to Ernest's astonishment--the messenger returned with a reply.

"The lady was just going out, sir, when I rang at the door," he explained, "and she took the letter from me herself. She didn't appear to know your handwriting, and she asked me who I came from. When I mentioned your name, I was ordered to wait."

Ernest opened the letter.

"DEAR MR. LISMORE--One of us must speak out, and your letter of apology forces me to be that one. If you are really so proud and so distrustful as you seem to be, I shall offend you. If not, I shall prove myself to be your friend.

"Your excuse is 'pressure of business.' The truth (as I have good reason to believe) is 'want of money.' I heard a stranger, at that public meeting, say that you were seriously embarrassed by some failure in the City.

"Let me tell you what my own pecuniary position is in two words. I am the childless widow of a rich man--"

Ernest paused. His anticipated discovery of Mrs. Callender's "charming daughter" was in his mind for the moment. "That little romance must return to the world of dreams," he thought--and went on with the letter.

"After what I owe to you, I don't regard it as repaying an obligation--I consider myself as merely performing a duty when I offer to assist you by a loan of money.

"Wait a little before you throw my letter into the wastepaper basket.

"Circumstances (which it is impossible for me to mention before we meet) put it out of my power to help you--unless I attach to my most sincere offer of service a very unusual and very embarrassing condition. If you are on the brink of ruin, that misfortune will plead my excuse--and your excuse, too, if you accept the loan on my terms. In any case, I rely on the sympathy and forbearance of the man to whom I owe my life.

"After what I have now written, there is only one thing to add. I beg to decline accepting your excuses; and I shall expect to see you tomorrow evening, as we arranged. I am an obstinate old woman--but I am also your faithful friend and servant,

"MARY CALLENDER."

Ernest looked up from the letter. "What can this possibly mean?" he wondered.

But he was too sensible a man to be content with wondering--he decided on keeping his engagement.

V.

WHAT Doctor Johnson called "the insolence of wealth" appears far more frequently in the houses of the rich than in the manners of the rich. The reason is plain enough. Personal ostentation is, in the very nature of it, ridiculous. But the ostentation which exhibits magnificent pictures, priceless china, and splendid furniture, can purchase good taste to guide it, and can assert itself without affording the smallest opening for a word of depreciation, or a look of contempt. If I am worth a million of money, and if I am dying to show it, I don't ask you to look at me--I ask you to look at my house.

Keeping his engagement with Mrs. Callender, Ernest discovered that riches might be lavishly and yet modestly used.

In crossing the hall and ascending the stairs, look where he might, his notice was insensibly won by proofs of the taste which is not to be purchased, and the wealth which uses but never exhibits its purse.

Conducted by a man-servant to the landing on the first floor, he found a maid at the door of the boudoir waiting to announce him. Mrs. Callender advanced to welcome her guest, in a simple evening dress perfectly suited to her age. All that had looked worn and faded in her fine face, by daylight, was now softly obscured by shaded lamps. Objects of beauty surrounded her, which glowed with subdued radiance from their background of sober color. The influence of appearances is the strongest of all outward influences, while it lasts. For the moment, the scene produced its impression on Ernest, in spite of the terrible anxieties which consumed him. Mrs. Callender, in his office, was a woman who had stepped out of her appropriate sphere. Mrs. Callender, in her own house, was a woman who had risen to a new place in his estimation.

"I am afraid you don't thank me for forcing you to keep your engagement," she said, with her friendly tones and her pleasant smile.

"Indeed I do thank you," he replied. "Your beautiful house and your gracious welcome have persuaded me into forgetting my troubles--for a while."

The smile passed away from her face. "Then it is true," she said gravely.

"Only too true."

She led him to a seat beside her, and waited to speak again until her maid had brought in the tea.

"Have you read my letter in the same friendly spirit in which I wrote it?" she asked, when they were alone again.

"I have read your letter gratefully, but--"

"But you don't know yet what I have to say. Let us understand each other before we make any objections on either side. Will you tell me what your present position is--at its worst? I can and will speak plainly when my turn comes, if you will honor me with your confidence. Not if it distresses you," she added, observing him attentively.

He was ashamed of his hesitation--and he made amends for it.

"Do you thoroughly understand me?" he asked, when the whole truth had been laid before her without reserve.

She summed up the result in her own words.

"If your overdue ship returns safely, within a month from this time, you can borrow the money you want, without difficulty. If the ship is lost, you have no alternative (when the end of the month comes) but to accept a loan from me or to suspend payment. Is that the hard truth?"

"It is."

"And the sum you require is--twenty thousand pounds?"

"Yes."

"I have twenty times as much money as that, Mr. Lismore, at my sole disposal--on one condition."

"The condition alluded to in your letter?"

"Yes."

"Does the fulfillment of the condition depend in some way on any decision of mine?"

"It depends entirely on you."

That answer closed his lips.

With a composed manner and a steady hand she poured herself out a cup of tea.

"I conceal it from you," she said; "but I want confidence. Here" (she pointed to the cup) "is the friend of women, rich or poor, when they are in trouble. What I have now to say obliges me to speak in praise of myself. I don't like it--let me get it over as soon as I can. My husband was very fond of me: he had the most absolute confidence in my discretion, and in my sense of duty to him and to myself. His last words, before he died, were words that thanked me for making the happiness of his life. As soon as I had in some degree recovered, after the affliction that had fallen on me, his lawyer and executor produced a copy of his will, and said there were two clauses in it which my husband had expressed a wish that I should read. It is needless to say that I obeyed."

She still controlled her agitation--but she was now unable to conceal it. Ernest made an attempt to spare her.

"Am I concerned in this?" he asked.

"Yes. Before I tell you why, I want to know what you would do--in a certain case which I am unwilling even to suppose. I have heard of men, unable to pay the demands made on them, who began business again, and succeeded, and in course of time paid their creditors."

"And you want to know if there is any likelihood of my following their example?" he said. "Have you also heard of men who have made that second effort--who have failed again--and who have doubled the debts they owed

to their brethren in business who trusted them? I knew one of those men myself. He committed suicide."

She laid her hand for a moment on his.

"I understand you," she said. "If ruin comes--"

"If ruin comes," he interposed, "a man without money and without credit can make but one last atonement. Don't speak of it now."

She looked at him with horror.

"I didn't mean _that!_" she said.

"Shall we go back to what you read in the will?" he suggested.

"Yes--if you will give me a minute to compose myself."

VI.

IN less than the minute she had asked for, Mrs. Callender was calm enough to go on.

"I now possess what is called a life-interest in my husband's fortune," she said. "The money is to be divided, at my death, among charitable institutions; excepting a certain event--"

"Which is provided for in the will?" Ernest added, helping her to go on.

"Yes. I am to be absolute mistress of the whole of the four hundred thousand pounds--" her voice dropped, and her eyes looked away from him as she spoke the next words--"on this one condition, that I marry again."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Surely I have mistaken you," he said. "You mean on this one condition, that you do _not_ marry again?"

"No, Mr. Lismore; I mean exactly what I have said. You now know that the recovery of your credit and your peace of mind rests entirely with yourself."

After a moment of reflection he took her hand and raised it respectfully to his lips. "You are a noble woman!" he said.

She made no reply. With drooping head and downcast eyes she waited for his decision. He accepted his responsibility.

"I must not, and dare not, think of the hardship of my own position," he

said; "I owe it to you to speak without reference to the future that may be in store for me. No man can be worthy of the sacrifice which your generous forgetfulness of yourself is willing to make. I respect you; I admire you; I thank you with my whole heart. Leave me to my fate, Mrs. Callender--and let me go."

He rose. She stopped him by a gesture.

"A young woman," she answered, "would shrink from saying--what I, as an old woman, mean to say now. I refuse to leave you to your fate. I ask you to prove that you respect me, admire me, and thank me with your whole heart. Take one day to think--and let me hear the result. You promise me this?"

He promised. "Now go," she said.

VII.

NEXT morning Ernest received a letter from Mrs. Callender. She wrote to him as follows:

"There are some considerations which I ought to have mentioned yesterday evening, before you left my house.

"I ought to have reminded you--if you consent to reconsider your decision--that the circumstances do not require you to pledge yourself to me absolutely.

"At my age, I can with perfect propriety assure you that I regard our marriage simply and solely as a formality which we must fulfill, if I am to carry out my intention of standing between you and ruin.

"Therefore--if the missing ship appears in time, the only reason for the marriage is at an end. We shall be as good friends as ever; without the encumbrance of a formal tie to bind us.

"In the other event, I should ask you to submit to certain restrictions which, remembering my position, you will understand and excuse.

"We are to live together, it is unnecessary to say, as mother and son. The marriage ceremony is to be strictly private; and you are so to arrange your affairs that, immediately afterward, we leave England for any foreign place which you prefer. Some of my friends, and (perhaps) some of your friends, will certainly misinterpret our motives--if we stay in our own country--in a manner which would be unendurable to a woman like me.

"As to our future lives, I have the most perfect confidence in you, and I should leave you in the same position of independence which you occupy

now. When you wish for my company you will always be welcome. At other times, you are your own master. I live on my side of the house, and you live on yours--and I am to be allowed my hours of solitude every day, in the pursuit of musical occupations, which have been happily associated with all my past life and which I trust confidently to your indulgence.

"A last word, to remind you of what you may be too kind to think of yourself.

"At my age, you cannot, in the course of Nature, be troubled by the society of a grateful old woman for many years. You are young enough to look forward to another marriage, which shall be something more than a mere form. Even if you meet with the happy woman in my lifetime, honestly tell me of it--and I promise to tell her that she has only to wait.

"In the meantime, don't think, because I write composedly, that I write heartlessly. You pleased and interested me, when I first saw you, at the public meeting. I don't think I could have proposed, what you call this sacrifice of myself, to a man who had personally repelled me--though I might have felt my debt of gratitude as sincerely as ever. Whether your ship is saved, or whether your ship is lost, old Mary Callender likes you--and owns it without false shame.

"Let me have your answer this evening, either personally or by letter--whichever you like best."

VIII.

MRS. CALLENDER received a written answer long before the evening. It said much in few words:

"A man impenetrable to kindness might be able to resist your letter. I am not that man. Your great heart has conquered me."

The few formalities which precede marriage by special license were observed by Ernest. While the destiny of their future lives was still in suspense, an unacknowledged feeling of embarrassment, on either side, kept Ernest and Mrs. Callender apart. Every day brought the lady her report of the state of affairs in the City, written always in the same words: "No news of the ship."

IX.

ON the day before the ship-owner's liabilities became due, the terms of the report from the City remained unchanged--and the special license was put to its contemplated use. Mrs. Callender's lawyer and Mrs. Callender's maid were the only persons trusted with the secret. Leaving the chief clerk in charge of the business, with every pecuniary demand

on his employer satisfied in full, the strangely married pair quitted England.

They arranged to wait for a few days in Paris, to receive any letters of importance which might have been addressed to Ernest in the interval. On the evening of their arrival, a telegram from London was waiting at their hotel. It announced that the missing ship had passed up Channel--undiscovered in a fog, until she reached the Downs--on the day before Ernest's liabilities fell due.

"Do you regret it?" Mrs. Lismore said to her husband.

"Not for a moment!" he answered.

They decided on pursuing their journey as far as Munich.

Mrs. Lismore's taste for music was matched by Ernest's taste for painting. In his leisure hours he cultivated the art, and delighted in it. The picture-galleries of Munich were almost the only galleries in Europe which he had not seen. True to the engagements to which she had pledged herself, his wife was willing to go wherever it might please him to take her. The one suggestion she made was, that they should hire furnished apartments. If they lived at an hotel, friends of the husband or the wife (visitors like themselves to the famous city) might see their names in the book, or might meet them at the door.

They were soon established in a house large enough to provide them with every accommodation which they required.

Ernest's days were passed in the galleries; Mrs. Lismore remaining at home, devoted to her music, until it was time to go out with her husband for a drive. Living together in perfect amity and concord, they were nevertheless not living happily. Without any visible reason for the change, Mrs. Lismore's spirits were depressed. On the one occasion when Ernest noticed it she made an effort to be cheerful, which it distressed him to see. He allowed her to think that she had relieved him of any further anxiety. Whatever doubts he might feel were doubts delicately concealed from that time forth.

But when two people are living together in a state of artificial tranquillity, it seems to be a law of Nature that the element of disturbance gathers unseen, and that the outburst comes inevitably with the lapse of time.

In ten days from the date of their arrival at Munich, the crisis came. Ernest returned later than usual from the picture-gallery, and--for the first time in his wife's experience--shut himself up in his own room.

He appeared at the dinner-hour with a futile excuse. Mrs. Lismore waited until the servant had withdrawn. "Now, Ernest," she said, "it's time to

tell me the truth."

Her manner, when she said those few words, took him by surprise. She was unquestionably confused; and, instead of looking at him, she trifled with the fruit on her plate. Embarrassed on his side, he could only answer:

"I have nothing to tell."

"Were there many visitors at the gallery?" she asked.

"About the same as usual."

"Any that you particularly noticed?" she went on. "I mean, among the ladies."

He laughed uneasily. "You forget how interested I am in the pictures," he said.

There was a pause. She looked up at him--and suddenly looked away again. But he saw it plainly: there were tears in her eyes.

"Do you mind turning down the gas?" she said. "My eyes have been weak all day."

He complied with her request--the more readily, having his own reasons for being glad to escape the glaring scrutiny of the light.

"I think I will rest a little on the sofa," she resumed. In the position which he occupied, his back would have been now turned on her. She stopped him when he tried to move his chair. "I would rather not look at you, Ernest," she said, "when you have lost confidence in me."

Not the words, but the tone, touched all that was generous and noble in his nature. He left his place, and knelt beside her--and opened to her his whole heart.

"Am I not unworthy of you?" he asked, when it was over.

She pressed his hand in silence.

"I should be the most ungrateful wretch living," he said, "if I did not think of you, and you only, now that my confession is made. We will leave Munich to-morrow--and, if resolution can help me, I will only remember the sweetest woman my eyes ever looked on as the creature of a dream."

She hid her face on his breast, and reminded him of that letter of her writing, which had decided the course of their lives.

"When I thought you might meet the happy woman in my life-time, I said to you, 'Tell me of it--and I promise to tell _her_ that she has only to wait.' Time must pass, Ernest, before it can be needful to perform my promise. But you might let me see her. If you find her in the gallery to-morrow, you might bring her here."

Mrs. Lismore's request met with no refusal. Ernest was only at a loss to know how to grant it.

"You tell me she is a copyist of pictures," his wife reminded him. "She will be interested in hearing of the portfolio of drawings by the great French artists which I bought for you in Paris. Ask her to come and see them, and to tell you if she can make some copies. And say, if you like, that I shall be glad to become acquainted with her."

He felt her breath beating fast on his bosom. In the fear that she might lose all control over herself, he tried to relieve her by speaking lightly. "What an invention yours is!" he said. "If my wife ever tries to deceive me, I shall be a mere child in her hands."

She rose abruptly from the sofa--kissed him on the forehead--and said wildly, "I shall be better in bed!" Before he could move or speak, she had left him.

X.

THE next morning he knocked at the door of his wife's room and asked how she had passed the night.

"I have slept badly," she answered, "and I must beg you to excuse my absence at breakfast-time." She called him back as he was about to withdraw. "Remember," she said, "when you return from the gallery to-day, I expect that you will not return alone."

* * * * *

Three hours later he was at home again. The young lady's services as a copyist were at his disposal; she had returned with him to look at the drawings.

The sitting-room was empty when they entered it. He rang for his wife's maid--and was informed that Mrs. Lismore had gone out. Refusing to believe the woman, he went to his wife's apartments. She was not to be found.

When he returned to the sitting-room, the young lady was not unnaturally offended. He could make allowances for her being a little out of temper at the slight that had been put on her; but he was inexpressibly disconcerted by the manner--almost the coarse manner--in which she expressed herself.

"I have been talking to your wife's maid, while you have been away," she said. "I find you have married an old lady for her money. She is jealous of me, of course?"

"Let me beg you to alter your opinion," he answered. "You are wronging my wife; she is incapable of any such feeling as you attribute to her."

The young lady laughed. "At any rate you are a good husband," she said satirically. "Suppose you own the truth? Wouldn't you like her better if she was young and pretty like me?"

He was not merely surprised--he was disgusted. Her beauty had so completely fascinated him, when he first saw her, that the idea of associating any want of refinement and good breeding with such a charming creature never entered his mind. The disenchantment to him was already so complete that he was even disagreeably affected by the tone of her voice: it was almost as repellent to him as the exhibition of unrestrained bad temper which she seemed perfectly careless to conceal.

"I confess you surprise me," he said, coldly.

The reply produced no effect on her. On the contrary, she became more insolent than ever.

"I have a fertile fancy," she went on, "and your absurd way of taking a joke only encourages me! Suppose you could transform this sour old wife of yours, who has insulted me, into the sweetest young creature that ever lived, by only holding up your finger--wouldn't you do it?"

This passed the limits of his endurance. "I have no wish," he said, "to forget the consideration which is due to a woman. You leave me but one alternative." He rose to go out of the room.

She ran to the door as he spoke, and placed herself in the way of his going out.

He signed to her to let him pass.

She suddenly threw her arms round his neck, kissed him passionately, and whispered, with her lips at his ear: "Oh, Ernest, forgive me! Could I have asked you to marry me for my money if I had not taken refuge in a disguise?"

XI.

WHEN he had sufficiently recovered to think, he put her back from him. "Is there an end of the deception now?" he asked, sternly. "Am I to trust you in your new character?"

"You are not to be harder on me than I deserve," she answered, gently.
"Did you ever hear of an actress named Miss Max?"

He began to understand her. "Forgive me if I spoke harshly," he said.
"You have put me to a severe trial."

She burst into tears. "Love," she murmured, "is my only excuse."

From that moment she had won her pardon. He took her hand, and made her sit by him.

"Yes," he said, "I have heard of Miss Max and of her wonderful powers of personation--and I have always regretted not having seen her while she was on the stage."

"Did you hear anything more of her, Ernest?"

"Yes, I heard that she was a pattern of modesty and good conduct, and that she gave up her profession, at the height of her success, to marry an old man."

"Will you come with me to my room?" she asked. "I have something there which I wish to show you."

It was the copy of her husband's will.

"Read the lines, Ernest, which begin at the top of the page. Let my dead husband speak for me."

The lines ran thus:

"My motive in marrying Miss Max must be stated in this place, in justice to her--and, I will venture to add, in justice to myself. I felt the sincerest sympathy for her position. She was without father, mother, or friends; one of the poor forsaken children, whom the mercy of the Foundling Hospital provides with a home. Her after life on the stage was the life of a virtuous woman: persecuted by profligates; insulted by some of the baser creatures associated with her, to whom she was an object of envy. I offered her a home, and the protection of a father--on the only terms which the world would recognize as worthy of us. My experience of her since our marriage has been the experience of unvarying goodness, sweetness, and sound sense. She has behaved so nobly, in a trying position, that I wish her (even in this life) to have her reward. I entreat her to make a second choice in marriage, which shall not be a mere form. I firmly believe that she will choose well and wisely--that she will make the happiness of a man who is worthy of her--and that, as wife and mother, she will set an example of inestimable value in the social sphere that she occupies. In proof of the heartfelt sincerity with which I pay my tribute to her virtues, I

add to this my will the clause that follows."

With the clause that followed, Ernest was already acquainted.

"Will you now believe that I never loved till I saw your face for the first time?" said his wife. "I had no experience to place me on my guard against the fascination--the madness some people might call it--which possesses a woman when all her heart is given to a man. Don't despise me, my dear! Remember that I had to save you from disgrace and ruin. Besides, my old stage remembrances tempted me. I had acted in a play in which the heroine did--what I have done! It didn't end with me, as it did with her in the story. _She_ was represented as rejoicing in the success of her disguise. _I_ have known some miserable hours of doubt and shame since our marriage. When I went to meet you in my own person at the picture-gallery--oh, what relief, what joy I felt, when I saw how you admired me--it was not because I could no longer carry on the disguise. I was able to get hours of rest from the effort; not only at night, but in the daytime, when I was shut up in my retirement in the music-room; and when my maid kept watch against discovery. No, my love! I hurried on the disclosure, because I could no longer endure the hateful triumph of my own deception. Ah, look at that witness against me! I can't bear even to see it!"

She abruptly left him. The drawer that she had opened to take out the copy of the will also contained the false gray hair which she had discarded. It had only that moment attracted her notice. She snatched it up, and turned to the fireplace.

Ernest took it from her, before she could destroy it. "Give it to me," he said.

"Why?"

He drew her gently to his bosom, and answered: "I must not forget my old wife."



POETRY

STRANGENESS

O love, thy lips are bright and cold,
Like jewels carven curiously
To symbols of a mystery,
A secret dim, forgotten, old.

Like woven amber, finely spun,
Thy hair, enwoofed with golden light,
Remembers yet the flaming flight
Of some unknown, archaic sun.

Thine eyes are crystals green and chill,
Wherein, as in a shifting sea,
Wan fires and drowning splendours flee
To stealthy deeps forever still.

Fallen across thy dreaming face,
The dawn is made a secret thing,
Like flame of crimson lamps that swing
At midnight, in a cavern-space.

Thy smile is like the furtive gleam
Of fleeing moons a traveller sees
Through closing arms of cypress-trees,
In secret realms of night and dream.

Sphinx-like, unsolved eternally,
Thy beauty's riddle doth abide,
And love hath come, and love hath died,
Striving to read the mystery.

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Ebony and Crystal*, by Clark Ashton Smith

LA NEVE

Scende la neve su la Terra madre,
placidamente. E lei bianca riceve
la Terra ne' suoi giusti ozi, da poi
che all'uom copia di frutti ha partorito.

Guarda il bifolco splendere a' sudati
campi la neve, mentre siede al desco;
e a lui dal cuor la speme e dal bicchiere
sorride la primiziã del vino.

--Scendi con pace, o neve; e le radici
difendi e i germi, che daranno ancora
erba molta alli armenti, all'uomo il pane.

Scendi con pace; sì che al novel tempo
da te nudriti, lungo il pian ridesto,
corran qual greggia obedienti i fiumi.

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Isaotta Guttadàuro ed altre poesie*, by
Gabriele D'Annunzio

DIFFUGERE NIVES, 1917

To J. C. S.

The snows have fled, the hail, the lashing rain,
Before the Spring.
The grass is starred with buttercups again,
The blackbirds sing.

Now spreads the month that feast of lovely things
We loved of old.
Once more the swallow glides with darkling wings
Against the gold.

Now the brown bees about the peach trees boom
Upon the walls;
And far away beyond the orchard's bloom
The cuckoo calls.

The season holds a festival of light,
For you, for me,
The shadows are abroad, there falls a blight
On each green tree.

And every leaf unfolding, every flower
Brings bitter meed;
Beauty of the morning and the evening hour
Quickens our need.

All is reborn, but never any Spring
Can bring back this;
Nor any fullness of midsummer bring
The voice we miss.

The smiling eyes shall smile on us no more;
The laughter clear,
Too far away on the forbidden shore,
We shall not hear.

Bereft of these until the day we die,
We both must dwell;
Alone, alone, and haunted by the cry:
“Hail and farewell!”

Yet when the scythe of Death shall near us hiss
Through the cold air,
Then on the shuddering marge of the abyss
They will be there.

They will be there to lift us from sheer space
And empty night;
And we shall turn and see them face to face
In the new light.

So shall we pay the unabated price
Of their release,
And found on our consenting sacrifice
Their lasting peace.

The hopes that fall like leaves before the wind,
The baffling waste,
And every earthly joy that leaves behind
A mortal taste.

The uncompleted end of all things dear,
The clanging door
Of Death, forever loud with the last fear,
Haunt them no more.

Without them the awakening world is dark
With dust and mire;
Yet as they went they flung to us a spark,
A thread of fire.

To guide us while beneath the sombre skies
Faltering we tread,
Until for us like morning stars shall rise
The deathless dead.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Poems, 1914-1919*, by Maurice Baring

NOGI

Great soldier of the fighting clan,
Across Port Arthur's frowning face of stone
You drew the battle sword of old Japan,
And struck the White Tsar from his Asian throne.

Once more the samurai sword
Struck to the carved hilt in your loyal hand,
That not alone your heaven-descended lord
Should meanly wander in the spirit land.

Your own proud way, O eastern star,
Grandly at last you followed. Out it leads
To that high heaven where all the heroes are,
Lovers of death for causes and for creeds.

Harriet Monroe

from: Project Gutenberg's *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, Volume I*, by Various



"OUT THERE"

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Lifted Masks*, by Susan Glaspell

The old man held the picture up before him and surveyed it with admiring but disapproving eye. "No one that comes along this way'll have the price for it," he grumbled. "It'll just set here 'till doomsday."

It did seem that the picture failed to fit in with the rest of the shop. A persuasive young fellow who claimed he was closing out his stock let the old man have it for what he called a song. It was only a little out-of-the-way store which subsisted chiefly on the framing of pictures. The old man looked around at his views of the city, his pictures of cats and dogs and gorgeous young women, his flaming bits of landscape. "Don't belong in here," he fumed, "any more 'an I belong in Congress."

And yet the old man was secretly proud of his acquisition. He seemed all at once to be lifted from his realm of petty tradesman to that of patron of art. There was a hidden dignity in his scowling as he shuffled about pondering the least ridiculous place for the picture.

It is not fair to the picture to try repainting it in words, for words reduce it to a lithograph. It was a bit of a pine forest, through which there exuberantly rushed an unspoiled little mountain stream. Chromos and works of art may deal with kindred subjects. There is just that one difference of dealing with them differently. "It ain't what you _see_, so much as what you can guess is there," was the thought it brought to the old man who was dusting it. "Now this frame ain't three feet long, but it wouldn't surprise me a bit if that timber kept right on for a hundred miles. I kind of suspect it's on a mountain--looks cool enough in there to be on a mountain. Wish I was there. Bet they never see no such days as we do in Chicago. Looks as though a man might call his soul his own--out there."

He began removing some views of Lincoln Park and some corpulent Cupids in order to make room in the window for the new picture. When he went outside to look at it he shook his head severely and hastened in to take away some ardent young men and women, some fruit and flowers and fish which he had left thinking they might "set it off." It was evident that the new picture did not need to be "set off." "And anyway," he told himself, in vindication of entrusting all his goods to one bottom, "I might as well take them out, for the new one makes them look so kind of sick that no one would have them, anyhow." Then he went back to mounting views with the serenity of one who stands for the finer things.

His clamorous little clock pointed to a quarter of six when he

finally came back to the front of the store. It was time to begin closing up for the night, but for the minute he stood there watching the crowd of workers coming from the business district not far away over to the boarding-house region, a little to the west. He watched them as they came by in twos and threes and fours: noisy people and worn-out people, people hilarious and people sullen, the gaiety and the weariness, the acceptance and the rebellion of humanity--he saw it pass. "As if any of them could buy it," he pronounced severely, adding, contemptuously, "or wanted to."

The girl was coming along by herself. He watched her as she crossed to his side of the street, thinking it was too bad for a poor girl to be as tired as that. She was dressed like many of the rest of them, and yet she looked different--like the picture and the chromo. She turned an indifferent glance toward the window, and then suddenly she stood there very still, and everything about her seemed to change. "For all the world," he told himself afterward, "as if she'd found a long-lost friend, and was 'fraid to speak for fear it was too good to be true."

She did seem afraid to speak--afraid to believe. For a minute she stood there right in the middle of the sidewalk, staring at the picture. And when she came toward the window it was less as if coming than as if drawn. What she really seemed to want to do was to edge away; yet she came closer, as close as she could, her eyes never leaving the picture, and then fear, or awe, or whatever it was made her look so queer gave way to wonder--that wondering which is ready to open the door to delight. She looked up and down the street as one rubbing one's eyes to make sure of a thing, and then it all gave way to a joy which lighted her pale little face like--"Well, like nothing I ever saw before," was all the old man could say of it. "Why, she'd never know if the whole fire department was to run right up here on the sidewalk," he gloated. Just then she drew herself up for a long breath. "See?" he chuckled, delightedly. "She knows it has a smell!" She looked toward the door, but shook her head. "Knows she can't pay the price," he interpreted her. Then, she stepped back and looked at the number above the door. "Coming again," he made of that; "ain't going to run no chances of losing the place." And then for a long time she stood there before the picture, so deeply and so strangely quiet that he could not translate her. "I can't just get the run of it," was his bewildered conclusion. "I don't see why it should make anybody act like that." And yet he must have understood more than he knew, for suddenly he was seeing her through a blur of tears.

As he began shutting up for the night he was so excited about the way she looked when she finally turned away that it never occurred to him to be depressed about her inability to pay the price.

He kept thinking of her, wondering about her, during the next day.

At a little before six he took up his station near the front window. Once more the current of workers flowed by. "I'm an old fool," he told himself, irritated at the wait; "as if it makes any difference whether she comes or not--when she can't buy it, anyhow. She's just as big a fool as I am--liking it when she can't have it, only I'm the biggest fool of all--caring whether she likes it or not." But just then the girl passed quickly by a crowd of girls who were ahead of her and came hurrying across the street. She was walking fast, and looked excited and anxious. "Afraid it might be gone," he said--adding, grimly: "Needn't worry much about that."

She came up to the picture as some people would enter a church. And yet the joy which flooded her face is not well known to churches. "I'll tell you what it's like"--the old man's thoughts stumbling right into the heart of it--"it's like someone that's been wandering round in a desert country all of a sudden coming on a spring. She's _thirsty_--she's drinking it in--she can't get enough of it. It's--it's the water of life to her!" And then, ashamed of saying a thing that sounded as if it were out of a poem, he shook his shoulders roughly as if to shake off a piece of sentiment unbecoming his age and sex.

He went to the door and watched her as she passed away. "I'll bet she'd never tip the scale to one hundred pounds," he decided. "Looks like a good wind could blow her away." She stooped a little and just as she passed from sight he saw that she was coughing.

Then the old man made what he prided himself was a great deduction. "She's been there, and she wants to go back. This kind of takes her back for a minute, and when she gets the breath of it she ain't so homesick."

All through those July days he watched each night for the frail-looking little girl who liked the picture of the pines. She would always come hurrying across the street in the same eager way, an eagerness close to the feverish. But the tenseness would always relax as she saw the picture. "She never looks quite so wilted down when she goes away as she does when she comes," the old man saw. "Upon my soul, I believe she really _goes_ there. It's--oh, Lord"--irritated at getting beyond his depth--"_I_ don't know!"

He never called it anything now but "Her Picture." One day at just ten minutes of six he took it out of the window. "Seems kind of mean," he admitted, "but I just want to find out how much she does think of it."

And when he found out he told himself that of all the mean men God had ever let live, he was the meanest. The girl came along in the usual hurried, anxious fashion. And when she saw the empty window he thought for a minute she was going to sink right down there on the

sidewalk. Everything about her seemed to give way--as if something from which she had been drawing had been taken from her. The luminousness gone from her face, there were cruel revelations. "Blast my _soul!_" the old man muttered angrily, not far from tearfully. She looked up and down the noisy, dirty, parched street, then back to the empty window. For a minute she just stood there--that was the worst minute of all. And then--accepting--she turned and walked slowly away, walked as the too-weary and the too-often disappointed walk.

It was with not wholly steady hand that the old man hastened to replace the picture, all the while telling himself what he thought of himself: more low-down than the cat who plays with the mouse, meaner than the man who'd take the bone from the dog, less to be loved than the man who would kick over the child's play-house, only to be compared with the brute who would snatch the cup of water from the dying--such were the verdicts he pronounced. He thought perhaps she would come back, and stayed there until almost seven, waiting for her, though pretending it was necessary that he take down and then put up again the front curtains. All the next day he was restless and irritable. As if to make up to the girl for the contemptible trick he had played he spent a whole hour that afternoon arranging a tapestry background for the picture. "She'll think," he told himself, "that this was why it was out, and won't be worried about its being gone again. This will just be a little sign to her that it's here to stay."

He began his watch that night at half-past five. After fifteen minutes the thought came to him that she might be so disheartened she would go home by another street. He became so gloomily certain she would do this that he was jubilant when he finally saw her coming along on the other side--coming purposelessly, shorn of that eagerness which had always been able, for the moment, to vanquish the tiredness. But when she came to the place where she always crossed the street she only stood there an instant and then, a little more slowly, a little more droopingly, walked on. She had given up! She was not coming over!

But she did come. After she had gone a few steps she hesitated again and this time started across the street. "That's right," approved the old man, "never give up the ship!"

She passed the store as if she were not going to look in; she seemed trying not to look, but her head turned--and she saw the picture. First her body seemed to stiffen, and then something--he couldn't make out whether or not it was a sob--shook her, and as she came toward the picture on her white, tired face were the tears.

"Don't you worry," he murmured affectionately to her retreating form, "it won't never be gone again."

The very next week he was put to the test. The kind of lady who did not often pass along that street entered the shop and asked to see the picture in the window. He looked at her suspiciously. Then he frowned at her, as he stood there, fumbling. Her picture! What would she think? What would she do? Then a crafty smile stole over his face and he walked to the window and got the picture. "The price of this picture, madame," he said, haughtily, "is forty dollars,"--adding to himself, "That'll fix her."

But the lady made no comment, and stood there holding the picture up before her. "I will take it," she said, quietly.

He stared at her stupidly. Forty dollars! Then it must be that the picture was better than the young man had known. "Will you wrap it, please?" she asked. "I will take it with me."

He turned to the back of the store. Forty dollars!--he kept repeating it in dazed fashion. And they had raised the rent on him, and the papers said coal would be high that winter--those facts seemed to have something to do with forty dollars. Forty dollars!--it was hammering at him, overwhelmed him, too big a sum to contend with. With long, grim stroke he tore off the wrapping paper; stoically he began folding it. But something was the matter. The paper would not go on right. Three times he took it off, and each time he could not help looking down at the picture of the pines. And each time the forest seemed to open a little farther; each time it seemed bigger--bigger even than forty dollars; it seemed as if it knew things--things more important than even coal and rent. And then the strangest thing of all happened: the forest faded away into its own shadowy distances, and in its place was a noisy, crowded, sun-baked street, and across the street was eagerly hurrying an anxious little girl, a frail little wisp of a girl who probably should not be crossing hot, noisy streets at all--then a light in tired eyes, a smile upon a worn face, relief as from a cooling breeze--and anyway, suddenly furious at the lady, furious at himself--"he'd be gol--darned if it wasn't her picture!"

He walked firmly back to the front of the store.

"I forgot at first," he said, brusquely, "that this picture belongs to someone else."

The lady looked at him in astonishment. "I do not understand," she said.

"There's nothing to understand," he fairly shouted, "except that it belongs to someone else!"

She turned away, but came back to him. "I will give you fifty dollars for it," she said, in her quiet way.

"Madame," he thundered at her, "you can stand there and offer me five hundred dollars, and I'm here to tell you that this picture is not for sale. Do you _hear_?"

"I certainly do," replied the lady, and walked from the store.

He was a long time in cooling off. "I tell you," he stormed to a very blue Lake Michigan he was putting into a frame, "it's hers--it's _hern_--and anybody that comes along here with any nonsense is just going to hear from _me_!"

In the days which followed he often thought to go out and speak to her, but perhaps the old man had a restraining sense of values. He planned some day to go out and tell her the picture was hers, but that seemed a silly thing to tell her, for surely she knew it anyway. He worried a good deal about her cough, which seemed to be getting worse, and he had it all figured out that when cold weather came he would have her come in where it was warm, and take her look in there. He felt that he knew all about her, and though he did not know her name, though he had never heard her speak one word, in some ways he felt closer to her than to any one else in the world.

Yet if the old man had known just how it was with the girl it is altogether unlikely that he would have understood. It would have mystified and disappointed him had he known that she had never seen a pine forest or a mountain in her life. Indeed there was a great deal about the little girl which the old man, together with almost all the rest of the world, would not have understood.

Not that the surface facts about her were either incomprehensible or interesting. The tale of her existence would sound much like that of a hundred other girls in the same city. Inquiry about her would have developed the facts that she did typewriting for a land company, that she did not seem to have any people, and lived at a big boarding-house. At the boarding-house they would have told you that she was a nice little thing, quiet as a mouse, and that it was too bad she had to work, for she seemed more than half sick. There the story would have rested, and the real things about her would not have been touched.

She worked for the Chicago branch of a big Northwestern land company. They dealt in the lands of Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. The things she sat at her typewriter and wrote were of the wonders of that great country: the great timber lands, the valleys and hills, towering mountain peaks and rushing rivers. She typewrote "literature" telling how there was a chance for every man out there, how the big, exhaustless land was eager to yield of its

store to all who would come and seek. Day after day she wrote those things telling how the sick were made well and the poor were made rich, how it was a land of indescribable wonders which the feeble pen could not hope to portray.

And the girl with whom almost everything in life had gone wrong came to think of Out There as the place where everything was right. It was the far country where there was no weariness nor loneliness, the land where one did not grow tired, where one never woke up in the morning too tired to get up, where no one went to bed at night too tired to go to sleep. The street-cars did not ring their gongs so loud Out There, the newsboys had pleasant voices, and there were no elevated trains. It was a pure, high land which knew no smoke nor dirt, a land where great silences drew one to the heart of peace, where the people in the next room did not come in and bang things around late at night. Out There was a wide land where buildings were far apart and streets were not crowded. Even the horses did not grow tired Out There. Oh, it was a land where dreams came true--a beautiful land where no one ate prunes, where the gravy was never greasy and the potatoes never burned. It was a land of flowers and birds and lovely people--a land of wealth and health and many smiles.

Her imagination made use of it all. She knew how men were reclaiming the desert of Idaho, of the tremendous undeveloped wealth of what had been an almost undiscovered State. She thrilled to the poetry of irrigation. Often when hot and tired and dusty her fancy would follow the little mountain stream from its birth way up in the clouds, her imagination rushing with it through sweetening forest and tumbling with it down cooling rocks until finally strong, bold, wise men guided it to the desert which had yearned for it through all the years, and the grateful desert smiled rich smiles of grain and flowers. She could make it more like a story than any story in any book. And she could always breathe better in thinking of the pine forests of Oregon. There was something liberating--expanding--in just the thought of them. She dreamed cooling dreams about them, dreams of their reaching farther than one's fancy could reach, big widening dreams of their standing there serene in the consciousness of their own immensity. They stood to her for a beautiful idea: the idea of space, of room--room for everybody, and then much more room! Even one's understanding grew big as one turned to them.

And she loved to listen for the Pacific Ocean, coming from incomprehensible distances and unknowable countries, now rushing with passion to the wild coast of Oregon, again stealing into the Washington harbours. She loved to address the letters to Portland, Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma--all those pulsing, vivid cities of a country of big chances and big beauty. She loved to picture Seattle, a city builded upon many hills--how wonderful that a city should be builded upon hills!--in Chicago there was nothing that could

possibly be thought of as a hill. And she loved to shut her eyes and let the great mountain peak grow in the distance, as one could see it from Portland--how noble a thing to see a mountain peak from a city! Sometimes she trembled before that consciousness of a mountain. Often when so tired she scarcely knew what she was doing she found she was saying her prayers to a mountain. Indeed, Out There seemed the place to send one's prayers--for was it not a place where prayers were answered?

During that summer when the West was overrun with tourists who grumbled about everything from the crowded trains to the way in which sea-foods were served, this little girl sat in one of the hot office buildings of Chicago and across the stretch of miles drew to herself the spirit of that country of coming days. Thousands rode in Pullman cars along the banks of the Columbia--saw, and felt not; she sat before her typewriter in a close, noisy room and heard the cooling rush of waters and got the freeing message of the pines. In some rare moments when she rose from the things about her to the things of which she dreamed she possessed the whole great land, and as the sultry days sapped of her meagre strength, and the bending over the typewriter cramped an already too cramped chest she clung with a more and more passionate tenacity to the bigness and the beauty and rightness of things Out There. And it was so kind to her--that land of deep breaths and restoring breezes. It never shut her out. It always kept itself bigger and more wonderful than one could ever hope to fancy it.

And the night she found the picture she knew that it was all really so. That was why it was so momentous a night. The picture was a dream visualised--a dreamer vindicated. They had pictures in the office, of course--some pictures trying to tell of that very kind of a place. But those were just pictures; this proved it, told what it meant. It told that she had been right, and there was joy in knowing that she had known. She clung to the picture as one would to that which proves as real all one has long held dear, loved it as the dreamer loves that which secures him in his dreaming.

She came to think of it as her own abiding place. Often when too tired for long wings of fancy she would just sink down in the deep, cool shadows of the pines, beside the little river which one knew so well was the gift of distant snows. It rested her most of all; it quieted her.

She smiled sometimes to think how no one in the office knew about it, wondered what they would think if they knew. Often she would find someone in the office looking at her strangely. She used to wonder about it a little.

And then one day Mr. Osborne sent for her to come into his office. He acted so queerly. As she came in and sat down near his desk he

swung his chair around and sat there with his back to her. After that he got up and walked to the window.

The head stenographer had complained of her cough. She said she did not think it right either to the girl or to the rest of them for her to be there. She said she hated to speak of it, but could not stand it any longer. That had been the week before, and ever since he had been putting it off. But now he could put it off no longer; the head stenographer was valuable, and besides he knew that she was right.

And so he told her--this was all he could think of just then--that they were contemplating some changes in the office, and for a time would have less desk room. If he sent her machine to her home, would she be willing to do her work there for a while? Hers was the kind of work that could be done at home.

She was sorry, for she wondered if she could find a place in her room for the typewriter, and it did not seem there would be air enough there to last her all day long. And she had grown fond of the office, with its "literature" and pictures and maps and the men who had just come from Out There coming in every once in a while. It was a bond--a place to touch realities. But of course there was nothing for her to do but comply, and she made no comment on the arrangement.

She pushed her chair back and rose to go. "Are you alone in the world?" he asked abruptly then,

"Yes; I--oh yes."

It was too much for him. "How would you like," he asked recklessly, "to have me get you transportation out West?"

She sank back in her chair. Every particle of colour had left her face. Her deep eyes had grown almost wild. "Oh," she gasped--"you can't mean--you don't think--"

"You wouldn't want to go?"

"I mean"--it was but a whisper--"it would be--too wonderful."

"You would like it then?"

She only nodded; but her lips were parted, her eyes glowing. He wondered why he had never seen before how different looking and--yes, beautiful, in a strange kind of way--she was.

"I see you have a cold," he said, "and I think you would get along better out there. I'll see if I can fix up the transportation, and get something with our people in one of the towns that would be good

for you."

She leaned back in her chair and sat there smiling at him. Something in the smile made him say, abruptly: "That's all; you may go now, and I'll send a boy with your machine."

She walked through the streets as one who had already found another country. More than one turned to look at her. She reached her room at last and pulling her one little chair up to the window sat staring out across the alley at the brick wall across from her. But she was not seeing a narrow alley and a high brick wall. She was seeing rushing rivers and mighty forests and towering peaks. She leaned back in her chair--an indulgence less luxurious than it sounds, as the chair only reached the middle of her back--and looked out at the high brick wall and saw a snow-clad range of hills. But she was tired; this tremendous idea was too much for her; the very wonder of it was exhausting. She lay down on her bed--radiant, but languid. Soon she heard a rush of waters. At first it was only someone filling the bath-tub, but after a while it was the little stream which flowed through her forest. And then she was not lying on a lumpy bed; she was sinking down under pine trees--all so sweet and still and cool. But an awful thing was happening!--the forest was on fire--it was choking and burning her! She awoke to find smoke from the building opposite pouring into her room; flies were buzzing about, and her face and hands were hot.

She did little work in the next few days. It was hard to go on with the same work when waiting for a thing which was to make over one's whole life. The stress of dreams changing to hopes caused a great languor to come over her. And her chair was not right for her typewriter, and the smoke came in all the time. Strangely enough Out There seemed farther away. Sometimes she could not go there at all; she supposed it was because she was really going.

At the close of the week she went to the office with her work. She was weak with excitement as she stepped into the elevator. Would Mr. Osborne have the transportation for her? Would he tell her when she was to go?

But she did not see Mr. Osborne at all. When she asked for him the clerk just replied carelessly that he was not there. She was going to ask if he had left any message for her, but the telephone rang then and the man to whom she was talking turned away. Someone was sitting at her old desk, and they did not seem to be making the changes they had contemplated; everyone in the office seemed very busy and uncaring, and because she knew her chin was trembling she turned away.

She had a strange feeling as she left the office: as if standing on ground which quivered, an impulse to reach out her hand and tell

someone that something must be done right away, a dreadful fear that she was going to cry out that she could not wait much longer.

All at once she found that she was crossing the street, and saw ahead the little art store with the wonderful picture which proved it was all really so. In the same old way, her step quickened. It would show her again that it was all just as she had thought it was, and if that were true, then it must be true also that Mr. Osborne was going to get her the transportation. It would prove that everything was all right.

But a cruel thing happened. It failed her. It was just as beautiful--but something a long way off, impossible to reach. Try as she would, she could not get into it, as she used to. It was only a picture; a beautiful picture of some pine trees. And they were very far away, and they had nothing at all to do with her.

Through the window, at the back of the store, she saw the old man standing with his back to her. She thought of going in and asking to sit down--she wanted to sit down--but perhaps he would say something cross to her--he was such a queer looking old man--and she knew she would cry if anything cross was said to her. That he had watched for her each night, that he had tried and tried to think of a way of finding her, that he would have been more glad to see her than to see anyone in the world, would have been kinder to her than anyone on earth would have been--those were the things she did not know. And so--more lonely than she had ever been before--she turned away.

On Monday she felt she could wait no longer. It did not seem that it would be safe. She got ready to go to see Mr. Osborne, but the getting ready tired her so that she sat a long time resting, looking out at the high brick wall beyond which there was nothing at all. She was counting the blocks, thinking of how many times she would have to cross the street. But just then it occurred to her that she could telephone.

When she came back upstairs she crept up on the bed and lay there very still. The boy had said that Mr. Osborne was away and would be gone two weeks. No one in the office had heard him say anything about her transportation.

All through the day she lay there, and what she saw before her was a narrow alley and a high brick wall. She had lost her mountains and her forests and her rivers and her lakes. She tried to go out to them in the same old way--but she could not get beyond the high brick wall. She was shut in. She tried to draw them to her, but they could not come across the wall. It shut them out. She tried to pray to the great mountain which one could see from Portland. But even prayers could get no farther than the wall.

Late that afternoon, because she was so shut in that she was choking, because she was consumed with the idea that she must claim her country now or lose it forever, she got up and started for the picture. It was a long, long way to go, and dreadful things were in between--people who would bump against her, hot, uneven streets, horses that might run over her--but she must make the journey. She must make it because the things that she lived on were slipping from her--and she was choking--sinking down--and all alone.

Step by step, never knowing just how her foot was going to make the next step, sick with the fear that people were going to run into her--the streets going up and down, the buildings round and round, she did go; holding to the window casings for the last few steps--each step a terrible chasm which she was never sure she was going to be able to cross--she was there at last. And in the window as she stood there, swayingly, was a dark, blurred thing which might have been anything at all. She tried to remember why she had come. What was it--? And then she was sinking down into an abyss.

That the hemorrhage came then, that the old man came out and found her and tenderly took her in, that he had her taken where she should have been taken long before, that the doctors said it was too late, and that soon their verdict was confirmed--those are the facts which would seem to tell the rest of the story. But deep down beneath facts rests truth, and the truth is that this is a story with the happiest kind of a happy ending. What facts would call the breeze from an electric fan was in truth the gracious breath of the pines. And when the nurse said "She's going," she was indeed going, but to a land of great spaces and benign breezes, a land of deep shadows and rushing waters. For a most wondrous thing had happened. She had called to the mountain, and the mountain had heard her voice; and because it was so mighty and so everlasting it drew her to itself, across high brick walls and past millions of hurrying, noisy people--oh, a most triumphant flight! And the mountain said--"I give you this whole great land. It is yours because you have loved it so well. Hills and valleys and rivers and forests and lakes--it is all for you." Yes, the nurse was quite right; she was going: going for a long sweet sleep beneath trees of many shadows, beside clear waters which had come from distant snows--really going "Out There."



AMATEUR IN CHANCERY

By George O. Smith

[Transcriber's Note: This Project Gutenberg EBook was produced from Galaxy Magazine October 1961. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]

The creature from Venus didn't know right from left--and life and death hung in the balance!

Paul Wallach came into my office. He looked distraught. By some trick of selection, Paul Wallach, the director of Project Tunnel, was one of the two men in the place who did not have a string of doctor's and scholar's degrees to tack behind their names. The other was I.

"Trouble, Paul?" I asked.

He nodded, saying, "The tunnel car is working."

"It should. It's been tested enough."

"Holly Carter drew the short straw."

"Er--" I started and then stopped short as the implication became clear. "She's--she's--not--?"

"Holly made it to Venus all right," he said. "Trouble is we can't get her back."

"Can't get her back?"

He nodded again. "You know, we've never really known very much about the atmosphere of Venus."

"Yes."

"Well, from what little came through just before Holly blacked out, it seems that there must be one of the cyanogens in the atmosphere in a concentration high enough to effect nervous paralysis."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning," said Paul Wallach in a flat tone, "that Holly Carter stopped

breathing shortly after she cracked the airlock. And her heart stopped beating a minute or so later."

"Holly--dead?"

"Not yet, Tom," he said. "If we can get her back in the next fifteen or twenty minutes, modern medicine can bring her back."

"But there'll be brain damage!"

"Oh, there may be some temporary impairment. Nothing that retraining can't restore. The big problem is to bring her back."

"We should have built two tunnel cars."

"We should have done all sorts of things. But when the terminal rocket landed on Venus, everybody in the place was too anxious to try it out. Lord knows, I tried to proceed at a less headlong pace. But issuing orders to you people is a waste of time and paper."

I looked at him. "Doc," I asked, giving him the honorary title out of habit, "Venus is umpty-million miles from here. We haven't another tunnel car, and no rocket could make it in time to do any good. So how can we hope to rescue Holly?"

"That's the point," said Wallach. "Venus, it appears, is inhabited."

"Oh?"

"That's what got Holly caught in the first place. She landed, then saw this creature approaching. Believing that no life could exist in an atmosphere dangerous to life, she opened the airlock and discovered otherwise."

"So?"

"So now all we have to do is to devise some way of explaining to a Venusian the difference between left and right. I thought you might help."

"But I'm just a computer programmer."

"That's the point. We all figured that you have developed a form of communication to that machine of yours. The rest of the crew, as you know, have a bit of difficulty in communicating among themselves in their own jargon, let alone getting through to normal civilians. When it comes to a Venusian, they're licked."

I said, "I'll try."

* * * * *

Project Tunnel is the hardware phase of a program started a number of years ago when somebody took a joke seriously.

In a discussion of how the tunnel diode works, one of the scientists pointed out that if an electron could be brought to absolute rest, its position according to Heisenberg Uncertainty would be completely ambiguous. Hence it had as high a possibility of being found on Venus as it had of being found on Earth or anywhere else. Now, the tunnel diode makes use of this effect by a voltage bias across the diode junction. Between narrow limits, the voltage bias is correct to upset the ambiguity of Mr. Heisenberg, making the electron nominally found on one side of the junction more likely to be found on the other.

Nobody could deny the operability of the tunnel diode. Project Tunnel was a serious attempt to employ the tunnel effect in gross matter.

The terminal rocket mentioned by Paul Wallach carried the equipment needed to establish the voltage bias between Venus and the Earth. Once established, Project Tunnel was in a state that caused it to maroon the most wonderful girl in the world.

Since the latter statement is my own personal opinion, my pace from the office to the laboratory was almost a dead run.

The laboratory was a madhouse. People stood in little knots, arguing. Those who weren't talking were shaking their heads in violent negation.

The only one who appeared un-upset was Teresa Dwight, our psi-girl. And here I must confess an error. When I said that Paul Wallach and I were the only ones without a string of professorial degrees, I missed Teresa Dwight. I must be forgiven. Teresa had a completely bland personality, zero drive, and a completely unstartling appearance. Teresa was only fourteen. But she'd discovered that her psi-power could get her anything she really wanted. Being human, therefore, she did not want much. So forgive me for passing her by.

But now I had to notice her. As I came in, she looked up and said, "Harla wants to know why can't he just try."

* * * * *

Wallach went white. "Tell that Venusian thing 'NO!' as loud as you can."

Teresa concentrated, then asked, "But why?"

"Does this Harla understand the Heisenberg Effect?"

She said after a moment, "Harla says he has heard of it as a theory."

But he is not quite prepared to believe that it does indeed exist as anything but an abstract physical concept."

"Tell Harla that Doctor Carter's awkward position is a direct result of our ability to reduce the tunnel effect to operate on gross matter."

"He realizes that. But now he wants to know why you didn't fire one of the lower animals as a test."

"Tell him that using animals for laboratory experiments is only possible in a police state where the anti-vivisection league can be exiled to Siberia. Mink coats and all. And let his Venusian mind make what it can of that. Now, Teresa--"

"Yes?"

"Tell Harla, very carefully, that pressing the left-hand button will flash the tunnel car back here as soon as he closes the airlock. But tell him that pushing the right-hand button will create another bias voltage--whereupon another mass of matter will cross the junction. In effect, it will rip a hole out of this laboratory near the terminal, over there, and try to make it occupy the same space as the tunnel car on Venus. None of us can predict what might happen when two masses attempt to occupy the same space. But the chances are that some of the holocaust will backfire across the gap and be as violent at this end, too."

"Harla says that he will touch nothing until he has been assured that it is safe."

"Good. Now, Tom," he said, addressing me, "how can we tell right from left?"

"Didn't you label 'em?"

"They're colored red on the right and green on the left."

"Is Harla color-blind?"

"No, but from what I gather Harla sees with a different spectrum than we do. So far as he is concerned both buttons look alike."

"You could have engraved 'em 'COME' and 'GO'."

Frank Crandall snorted. "Maybe you can deliver an 'English, Self-Taught' course through Teresa to the Venusian?"

I looked at Crandall. I didn't much care for him. It seemed that every time Holly Carter came down out of her fog of theoretical physics long enough to notice a simpleton who had to have a machine to perform

routine calculations, we were joined by Frank Crandall who carted her off and away from me. If this be rank jealousy, make the most of it. I'm human.

"Crandall," I said, "even to a Hottentot I could point out that the engraved legend 'GO' contains two squiggly symbols, whereas the legend 'RETURN' contains 'many'."

* * * * *

Wallach stepped into the tension by saying, "So we didn't anticipate alien life. But now we've got the problem of communicating with it."

Crandall didn't appear to notice my stiff reply. He said, "Confound it, what's missing?"

"What's missing," I told him, "is some common point of reference."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that I could define left from right to any semi-intelligent human being who was aware of the environment in which we live."

"For example?"

I groped for an example and said, lamely, "Well, there's the weather rule, valid for the northern hemisphere. When the wind is blowing on your back, the left hand points to the low pressure center."

"Okay. But how about Venus? Astronomical information, I mean."

I shook my head.

"Why not?" he demanded. "If we face north, the sun rises on our right, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Even in the southern hemisphere."

"Well, then. So it doesn't make any difference which hemisphere they're in."

"You're correct. But you're also making the assumptions that Venus rotates on its axis, that the axis is aligned parallel to the Earth's and that the direction of rotation is the same."

"We know that Venus rotates!"

"We have every reason to believe so," I agreed. "But only because thermocouples measure a temperature on the darkside that is too high to support the theory that the diurnal period of Venus is equal to the

year. I think the latest figures say something between a couple of weeks and a few months. Next, the axis needn't be parallel to anything. Shucks, Crandall, you know darned well that the solar system is a finely made clock with no two shafts aligned, and elliptical gears that change speed as they turn."

* * * * *

"Practically everything in the solar system rotates in the same direction."

I looked at him. "Would you like to take a chance that Venus agrees with that statement? You've got a fifty percent chance that you'll be right. Guess wrong and we have a metric ton of hardware trying to occupy the same space as another metric ton of matter."

"But--"

"And furthermore," I went on, "we're just lucky that Polaris happens to be a pole star right now. The poles of Mars point to nothing that bright. Even then, we can hardly expect the Venusian to have divided the circumpolar sky into the same zoo full of mythical animals as our forebears--and if we use the commonplace expression, maybe the Venusian never paused to take a long-handled dipper of water from a well. Call them stewpots and the term is still insular. Sure, there's lots of pointers, but they have to be identified. My mother always insisted that the Pleiades were--er--was the Little Dipper."

Teresa Dwight spoke up, possibly for the second or third time in her life without being spoken to first. She said, "Harla has been listening to you through me. Of astronomy he has but a rudimentary idea. He is gratified to learn from you that there is a 'sun' that provides the heat and light. This has been a theory based upon common sense; something had to do it. But the light comes and goes so slowly that it is difficult to determine which direction the sun rises from. The existence of other celestial bodies than Venus is also based on logic. If, they claim, they exist, and their planet exists, then there probably are other planets with people who cannot see them, either."

"Quoth Pliny the Elder," mumbled Paul Wallach.

I looked at him.

"Pliny was lecturing about Pythagoras' theory that the Earth is round. A heckler asked him why the people on the other side didn't fall off. Pliny replied that on the other side there were undoubtedly fools who were asking their wise men why we didn't fall off."

"It's hardly germane," I said.

"I'm sorry. Yes. And time is running out."

* * * * *

The laboratory door opened to admit a newcomer, Lou Graham, head of the electronics crew.

He said, "I've got it!"

The chattering noise level died out about three decibels at a time. Lou said, "When a steel magnet is etched in acid, the north pole shows selective etching!"

I shook my head. "Lou," I said, "we don't know whether Venus has a magnetic field, whether it is aligned to agree with the Earth's--nor even whether the Venusians have discovered the magnetic compass."

"Oh, that isn't the reference point," said Lou Graham. "I'm quite aware of the ambiguity. The magnetic field does have a vector, but the arrow that goes on the end is strictly from human agreement."

"So how do you tell which is the north pole?"

"By making an electromagnet! Then using Ampere's Right Hand Rule. You grasp the electromagnet in the right hand so that the fingers point along the winding in the direction of the current flow. The thumb then points to the north pole."

"Oh, fine! Isn't that just the same confounded problem? Now we've got to find out whether Harla is equipped with a right hand complete with fingers and thumbs--so that we can tell him which his right hand is!"

"No, no," he said. "You don't understand, Tom. We don't need the right hand. Let's wind our electromagnet like this: We place the steel bar horizontally in front of us. The wire from 'Start' leaves us, passes over the top of the bar, drops below the bar on the far side, comes toward us on the under side, rises above the bar on the side toward us, and so on around and around until we've got our electromagnet wound. Now if the 'start' is positive and the 'end' is negative, the north pole will be at the left. It will show the selective etching in acid."

I looked at him. "Lou," I said slowly, "if you can define positive and negative in un-ambiguous terms as well as you wound that electromagnet, we can get Holly home. Can you?"

Lou turned to Teresa Dwight. "Has this Harla fellow followed me so far?"

She nodded.

"Can you speak for him?"

"You talk, I hear, he reads me. I read him and I can speak."

* * * *

"Okay, then," said Lou Graham. "Now we build a Le Clanche cell. Ask Harla does he recognize carbon. A black or light-absorbing element. Carbon is extremely common, it is the basis of life chemistry. It is element number six in the periodic chart. Does Harla know carbon?"

"Harla knows carbon."

"Now we add zinc. Zinc is a light metal easily extracted from the ore. It is fairly abundant, and it is used by early civilizations for making brass or bronze long before the culture has advanced enough to recognize zinc as an element. Does Harla know zinc?"

"He may," said Teresa very haltingly. "What happens if Harla gets the wrong metal?"

"Not very much," said Lou. "Any of the light, fairly plentiful metals that are easily extracted from the ore will suffice. Say tin, magnesium, sodium, cadmium, so on."

"Harla says go on."

"Now we make an electrolyte. Preferably an alkaline salt."

"Be careful," I said. "Or you'll be asking Harla to identify stuff from a litmus paper."

"No," said Lou. He faced Teresa and said, "An alkaline substance burns the flesh badly."

"So do acids," I objected.

"Alkaline substances are found in nature," he reminded me. "Acids aren't often natural. The point is that an acid will work. Even salt water will work. But an alkaline salt works better. At any rate, tell Harla that the stuff, like zinc, was known to civilized peoples many centuries before chemistry became a science. Acids, on the other hand, are fairly recent."

"Harla understands."

"Now," said Lou Graham triumphantly, "we make our battery by immersing the carbon and the zinc in the electrolyte. The carbon is the positive electrode and should be connected to the start of our electromagnet, whereas the end of the winding must go to the zinc. This will place the north pole to the left hand."

"Harla understands," said Teresa. "So far, Harla can perform this experiment in his mind. But now we must identify which end of the steel bar is north-pole magnetic."

"If we make the bar magnetic and then immerse it in acid, the north magnetic pole will be selectively etched."

"Harla says that this he does not know about. He has never heard of it, although he is quite familiar with electromagnets, batteries, and the like."

I looked at Lou Graham. "Did you cook this out of your head, or did you use a handbook?"

He looked downcast. "I did use a handbook," he admitted. "But--"

"Lou," I said unhappily, "I've never said that we couldn't establish a common frame of reference. What we lack is one that can be established in minutes. Something physical--" I stopped short as a shadowy thought began to form.

* * * * *

Paul Wallach looked at me as though he'd like to speak but didn't want to interrupt my train of thoughts. When he could contain himself no longer, he said, "Out with it, Tom."

"Maybe," I muttered. "Surely there must be something physical."

"How so?"

"The tunnel car must be full of it," I said. "Screws?"

I turned to Saul Graben. Saul is our mechanical genius; give him a sketch made on used Kleenex with a blunt lipstick and he will bring you back a gleaming mechanism that runs like a hundred-dollar wrist watch.

But not this time. Saul shook his head.

"What's permanent is welded and what's temporary is snapped in with plug buttons," he said.

"Good Lord," I said. "There simply must be something!"

"There probably is," said Saul. "But this Harla chap would have to use an acetylene torch to get at it."

I turned to Teresa. "Can this psi-man Harla penetrate metal?"

"Can anyone?" she replied quietly.

Wallach touched my arm. "You're making the standard, erroneous assumption that a sense of perception will give its owner a blueprint-clear grasp of the mechanical details of some machinery. It doesn't. Perception, as I understand it, is not even similar to eyesight."

"But--" I fumbled on--"surely there must be some common reference there, even granting that perception isn't eyesight. So how does perception work?"

"Tom, if you were blind from birth, I could tell you that I have eyesight that permits me to see the details of things that you can determine only by feeling them. This you might understand basically. But you could never be made to understand the true definition of the word 'picture' nor grasp the mental impression that is generated by eyesight."

"Well," I persisted, "can he penetrate flesh?"

"Flesh?"

"Holly's heart has stopped," I said. "But it hasn't been removed. If Harla can perceive through human flesh, he might be able to perceive the large, single organ in the chest cavity near the spine."

Teresa said, "Harla's perception gives him a blurry, incomplete impression." She looked at me. "It is something like a badly out-of-focus, grossly under-exposed x-ray solid."

"X-ray solid?" I asked.

"It's the closest thing that you might be able to understand," she said lamely.

I dropped it right there. Teresa had probably been groping in the dark for some simile that would convey the nearest possible impression. I felt that this was going to be the nearest that I would ever get to understanding the sense of perception.

"Can't he get a clear view?"

"He has not the right."

"Right!" I exploded. "Why--"

Wallach held up his hand to stop me. "Don't make Teresa fumble for words, Tom. Harla has not the right to invade the person of Holly Carter. Therefore he can not get a clearer perception of her insides."

"Hell!" I roared. "Give Harla the right."

"No one has authority."

"Authority be damned!" I bellowed angrily. "That girl's life is at stake!"

* * * * *

Wallach nodded unhappily. "Were this a medical emergency, a surgeon might close his eyes to the laws that require authorization to operate. But even if he saved the patient's life, he is laying himself open to a lawsuit. But this is different, Tom. As you may know, the ability of any psi-person is measured by their welcome to the information. Thus Teresa and Harla, both willing to communicate, are able."

"But can't Harla understand that the entire bunch of us are willing that he should take a peek?"

"Confound it, Tom, it isn't a matter of our permission! It's a matter of fact. It would ease things if Holly were married to one of us, but even so it wouldn't be entirely clear. It has to do with the invasion of privacy."

"Privacy? In this case the very idea is ridiculous."

"Maybe so," said Paul Wallach. "But I don't make the rules. They're natural laws. As immutable as the laws of gravity or the refraction of light. And Tom, even if I were making the laws I might not change things. Not even to save Holly Carter's life. Because, Tom, if telepathy and perception were as free and unbounded as some of their early proponents claimed, life would be a sheer, naked hell on earth."

"But what has privacy to do with it? This Harla isn't at all humanoid. A cat can look at a king--"

"Sure, Tom. But how long would the cat be permitted to read the king's mind?"

I grunted. "Has this Harla any mental block about examining the outside?"

He looked at me thoughtfully. "You're thinking about a scar or some sort of blemish?"

"Yes. Birthmark, maybe. No one is perfect."

"You know of any?"

I thought.

It was not hard for me to conjure up a picture of Holly Carter. Unfortunately, I looked at Holly Carter through the eyes of love, which rendered her perfect. If she had bridgework, I hadn't found it out. Her features were regular and her hair fell loose without a part. Her complexion was flawless ... at least the complexion that could be examined whilst Holly sunned herself on a deck chair beside the swimming pool.

I shook my head. Then I faced an unhappy fact. It hurt, because I wanted my goddess to be perfect, and if she were made of weak, mortal flesh, I did not want to find it out by asking the man who knew her better than I did.

Still, I wanted her alive. So I turned to Frank Crandall.

"Do you?" I asked.

"Do I what?"

"Know of any scars or birthmarks?"

"Such as?"

"Oh, hell," I snapped. "Such as an appendix scar that might be used to tell left from right."

"Look, Tom, I'm not her physician, you know. I can only give you the old answer: 'Not until they wear briefer swim suits.'"

My heart bounced lightly. That Holly was still in mortal danger was not enough to stop my elation at hearing Frank Crandall admit that he was not Holly's lover, nor even on much better terms than I. It might have been better to face the knowledge that Holly was all woman and all human even though the information had to come from someone who knew her well enough to get her home.

Then I came back to earth. I had my perfect goddess--in deadly peril--instead of a human woman who really did not belong to any man.

* * * * *

I hadn't seen Saul Graben leave, but he must have been gone because now he opened the door and came back. He was carrying a heavy rim gyroscope that was spinning in a set of frictionless gymbals. He looked most confused.

He said, "I've spent what seems like an hour. You can't tell me that this gizmo is inseparable from the selfish, insular intellect of

terrestrial so-called homo sapiens."

He turned the base and we all watched the gymbal rings rotate to keep the gyro wheel in the same plane. "It should be cosmic," he said. "But every time I start, I find myself biting myself on the back of the neck. Look. If you make the axle horizontal in front of you and rotate the gyro with the top edge going away from you, you can define a common reference. But motion beyond that cannot be explained. If the axle is depressed on the right side, the gyro will turn so the far edge looks to the right. But that's defining A in terms of A. So I'm licked."

Frank Crandall shook his head. "There's probably an absolute to that thing somewhere, but I'm sure none of us know it. We haven't time to find it. In fact, I think the cause is lost. Maybe we'd better spend our time figuring out a plausible explanation."

"Explanation?" blurted Wallach.

"Let's face it," said Crandall. "Holly Carter's life is slipping away. No one has yet come close to finding a common reference to describe right from left to this Harla creature."

"So what's your point?"

"Death is for the dying," Crandall said in a monotone. "Let them have their hour in peace and dignity. Life is for the living, and for the living there is no peace. We who remain must make the best of it. So now in about five minutes Holly will be at peace. The rest of us have got to answer for her."

"How do you mean?"

"How do you propose to explain this unfortunate incident?" asked Crandall. "Someone will want to know what happened to the remains of Holly Carter. I can see hell breaking loose. And I can see the whole lot of us getting laughed right off the Earth because we couldn't tell right from left. And I can see us all clobbered for letting the affair take place."

"You seem to be more worried about your professional reputation than about Holly Carter's life!"

"I have a future," he said. "Holly doesn't seem to. Hell," he groaned, "we can't even gamble on it."

"Gamble?"

"How successful do you think you'd be in getting this Venusian to risk his life by closing his eyes and making a fifty-fifty stab in the dark at one of those buttons?"

"Well--" started Wallach--"we'd be gambling too, you know. But--"

* * * * *

"Wait a moment," I said. "I've got a sort of half-cracked theory. May I try?"

"Of course."

"Not 'of course.' I'll have to have quiet, with just Teresa to communicate through."

"If you have any ideas, try them," said Wallach.

"Do you really know what you're doing?" demanded Frank Crandall.

"I think so," I replied. "If it works, it'll be because I happen to feel close to Holly."

"Could be," he said with a shrug. I almost flipped. Duels have been fought over less. But instead of taking offense, Crandall topped it off by adding, "You could have been a lot closer if you'd tried. She always said you had the alert, pixie-type mind that was pure relaxation instead of a dead let-down after a period of deep concentration. But you were always scuttling off somewhere. Well, go ahead and try, Tom. And good luck!"

I took a deep breath.

"Teresa?" I asked.

"Yes, Mr. Lincoln?"

"Tell Harla to concentrate on the buttons."

"He is."

"There is a subtle difference between them."

"This he knows, but he does not know what it is."

"There is a delicate difference in warmth. One button will be faintly warmer than the other."

"Harla has felt them."

I dropped the third-person address and spoke to Teresa as if she were but one end of a telephone line. "Harla," I said, "only part of the difference lies in the warmth to physical touch. There should be

another kind of warmth. Are you not affected by a feeling that one is better than the other?"

Harla's reply came direct through Teresa: "Why yes, I am indeed drawn to the warmer of the two. Were this a game I would wager on it. But that is emotion and hardly suitable as a guide."

"Ah, but it is!" I replied quickly. "This is our frame of reference. Press the warmer of the but--"

I was violently interrupted. Wallach shook me violently and hurled me away from Teresa. Frank Crandall was facing the girl, shouting, "No! No! The warm one will be the red one! You must press the green--"

And then he, too, was interrupted.

Displaced air made a near-explosive woosh! and the tunnel car was there on its pad. In it was a nightmare horror holding a limp Holly Carter across its snakelike tentacles. A free tentacle opened the door.

"Take her while I hold my breath," said Harla, still talking through Teresa. "I'll return the tunnel car empty. I can, now that I know that warmth is where the hearth is."

Harla dropped the unconscious girl in my arms and snapped back into the car. It disappeared, then returned empty just as the doctor was bending over Holly.

* * * * *

So now I have my Holly, but every now and then I lie awake beside her in a cold sweat. Harla could have guessed wrong. Just as Wallach and Crandall had been wrong in assuming the red button would be warmer than the green. Their reaction was as emotional as Harla's.

I hope Harla either forgives me or never finds out that I had to sound sure of myself, and that I had to play on his emotions simply to get him to take the fifty-fifty chance on his--hers--our lives.

And I get to sleep only after I've convinced myself that it was more than chance ... that somehow our feelings and emotions guided Harla where logic and definition fail.

For right and left do not exist until terrestrial man defines them.

